

## The Weak and the Strong (Romans 14:1-15:13)

14-Jul-2024

### Romans 14:1-23

#### The Weak and the Strong

**14** Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. <sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

<sup>5</sup> One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. <sup>6</sup> Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

<sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
‘every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or

sister. <sup>14</sup> I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. <sup>15</sup> If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

<sup>19</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. <sup>20</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. <sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

<sup>22</sup> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. <sup>23</sup> But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

### **Romans 15:1-13**

**15** We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." <sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, <sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's

truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed <sup>9</sup> and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

“Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name.”

<sup>10</sup> Again, it says,

“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.”

<sup>11</sup> And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him.”

<sup>12</sup> And again, Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope.”

<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Sermon: “The Weak and the Strong”

Please turn your Bible to **Romans chapter 14** – starting at verse 1.

There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

### Recap/Intro

Since chapter 12 – the Apostle Paul has been **looking at relationships** and **emphasizing love**. Paul mentioned:

**[Slide-Recap]**

- Our relationship with **God**
- Our relationship with **ourselves**
- Our relationship with **each other**
- Our relationship with **those who are not so nice**
- Our relationship with **governing authorities**
- And last week our relationship with our **neighbours**

### [Slide-This week]

This week Paul is looking at the **relationship between two groups** of people in the Church in **Rome** - the “**weak**” and the “**strong**”.

It’s **important to understand** from the outset that when Paul talks about a “**weak**” person – he does not mean **weak in will** or **weak in character** – but – **weakness in confidence that their faith allows them to do certain things**.

When we picture a “weak” person – we should not picture a **vulnerable Christian easily overcome by temptation** – but rather **a sensitive Christian who struggles with their freedom of conscience and what their conscience will allow them to do!**

Now in the Church in Rome – there were **Jewish Christians** and **Non-Jewish Christians**. Two totally **different cultures** with **different traditions**.

A bit like our church here at Toukley – where we have **Aussies, Kiwis, British, Irish, Europeans, South African and Chinese** – all joining together – from **diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions**.

For many of the **Jewish Christians** in Rome – **their weakness** was their continued **commitment to the Old Testament regulations** on **diet** (only eating food that was deemed clean) and their commitment to celebrating **Jewish feast days**.

### [Slide-Summary]

In our Bible passage this morning Paul

1. **Warns about having a judgmental attitude** – Romans 14:1-12
2. **Gives limitations on the liberty or freedom we have as Christians** – Romans 14:13-23
3. And **calls us to have unity in the Church** – Romans 15:1-13

### Warning about a Judgmental Attitude (Romans 14 vv1-12)

#### [Slide-warning heading]

1<sup>st</sup> then – **warning about a judgmental attitude** – vv1-12

Look at verse 1 – Paul tells us to - *accept the one whose faith is weak without quarrelling over disputable matters*

What might a **disputable matter** be?

In **Rome** – it was things that **they should and should not eat** – AND – **which days should be celebrated**

For us **today** – here are some **examples**:

- Not-eating **meat** on **Friday**
- **Frequency** that we celebrate the **Lord' Supper**
- When the **Sabbath** is – **Saturday or Sunday**

- What we **should and shouldn't do on the Sabbath**
- Acknowledging **Old Testament festivals** – like Passover, Pentecost
- What form of **baptism** we use – full immersion or sprinkling?
- Which **version of the Bible** we should read
- What **diet** we follow
- What **clothes we wear** to Church
- What **style of music** we have at Church
- What **church governance** should look like
- Our **interpretation** of what will happen when **Jesus returns**
- Speaking in **tongues**

All these topics are **subjective** – and **non-essential** for us to be saved for Heaven – nor do they get us to Heaven any quicker! Yet if we're not careful we can get into some humdinger **arguments** about them!

We must not **elevate non-essentials**, especially things of custom, tradition and ceremony – and - **make them ways of proving a person is a Christian** – or **make them conditions of us fellowshiping with a person!**

### **[Slide-warning]**

Paul's saying "weaker" people might get bogged down in this stuff

But v1 – Paul says we are *to accept people who are "weaker" without being judgmental* (vv2-3)

Why?

- V3 – Because - **God has accepted them** – so what right do we have to judge them and reject them!

- V4 – Because - **They are servants of God** – He’s their master – and He can help them stand in their weakness
- VV5-9 – Because - Jesus died and rose to be Lord of all – **Lord of both the weak and the strong**. So, whether a person is weak or strong in these matters – **Jesus is their Lord, and they belong to Him** – and they are **living their life for the Lord to the best of their ability** – and we need to mind our **own business!**
- V10a – We should accept them and not be judgmental - because **they are our brothers and sisters in Christ** – they are family! (v10a)
- And we should accept them and not be judgmental – vv10b-13a - because **everyone will one day stand before God’s Judgment Seat and be judged** – and **God is the ultimate judge**

**Challenge:** What ways are we judging others in non-essential matters?

(pause)

### The Limitations of Liberty/Freedom (Romans 14 vv13-23)

#### **[Slide-limits]**

Paul then goes onto explain – in vv13-23...

There are **limitations of liberty/freedom for those who are strong when dealing with those who are weak**

- See vv13-15 – Paul says **we are not to be a stumbling block to our weaker brother or sister in Christ** – **Jesus died for them too** – not just for us!

How might we be a **stumbling block**?

Here's a few examples:

*Let's say we have a few people over for dinner – and one of our guests doesn't drink alcohol because a few years ago they had a drinking problem – and we know this – but we serve wine to everyone and encourage everyone to have a drink. Our guest who had the drinking problem finds it really difficult to be in that environment and it triggers them badly – and has them doubting why they couldn't just have one drink – but they know it could lead to a drinking problem for them again. The loving thing to do is to not serve alcohol at dinner on this occasion.*

*Again, we have a few people over for dinner – and we know one of our guests has a heart problem and is meant to eat healthy, but we dish up takeaway fast food – which causes them to eat unhealthily.*

*We have a relatively new Christian in our Bible Study, and we tell them the Bible Version they are reading is not as good as the version we are reading; this causes them distress and discourages them from reading the Bible altogether or even to stop coming to the Bible Study group*

What we need to realize is that whenever we insist on our way for any of these subjective non-essential matters – **there's the danger that we offend our brother or sister – or even cause them to stumble or fall!**



- Paul also warns in v16 – that if a stronger Christian forces their freedom down the neck of a weaker Christian – OR if a weaker Christian forces their weakness down the neck of a stronger Christian – Paul says - **there's the danger of what we know as good be spoken of as evil!**

Some examples of that:

*Celebrating a cultural festival – like St. Andrews Day - might be seen as strange or unnecessary by those from non-Scottish backgrounds, causing them to view it negatively even though it holds significance for the person insisting on it.*

*A person might insist on adhering strictly to a particular diet regimen (e.g., veganism, gluten-free) for health or ethical reasons. If they communicate their dietary requirements in a way that appears judgmental or dismissive of others' dietary choices, it can cause others to feel criticized or uncomfortable, leading them to see the insistence on the diet as a negative imposition.*

*In discussions about politics, someone might insist on their political beliefs or affiliations in a manner that comes across as aggressive or dismissive of opposing viewpoints. This insistence can create tension and division, causing others to view the stance as divisive or harmful, even if the intention was to promote what they believe to be right.*

- Paul's saying there has to be limitations on our liberty of freedom – vv17-21 – because **-the Kingdom of God is more important that these non-essential matters**

You see – if we argue about food or drink or feast days or get pedantic about non-essential matters – v20 – we can *destroy God's work within our church* – instead, Paul says – v17 – the *kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Therefore, Paul says - v19 – *we are to make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification*. We should be about - **building people up** – not tearing them down!

- Paul finishes this section – in vv22-23 – by **giving a way to keep our liberty or freedom in check and keeping our consciences clear in non-essential matters**

Paraphrasing - Paul's saying: "*Keep our faith between us and God. If we're convinced something is right, then we follow it in peace and we don't have to force it upon others. But if we have doubts about what we're doing and then still do it, we're not acting from faith. And remember, whatever isn't from faith is sin.*"

By doing this – **we keep our consciences clear** – and **keep unity in the Church** – which is Paul's third point – in Romans 15:1-13 [Please turn there now]

## The Call to Unity (Romans 15:1-13)

### [Slide-Unity]

Look at verses 1-2 – **Paul wants us to foster unity – by the stronger one bearing with the failings of the weaker one – and not just pleasing themselves but pleasing their neighbours for their good.**

The purpose of that is to **build the weaker one up – which will bring harmony and unity in the Church.**

Why should **bear with the weaker one?**

- V3 – Well – **Jesus didn't please Himself – He always pleased His Father in Heaven.** Jesus even copped insults and persecution for His Father's sake. So, if Jesus didn't just please Himself – why do we think we can just please ourselves?
- V4 – Paul says **all the scripture written down in the past – was written down for our benefit to learn endurance and perseverance.** When we read about Jesus' life – **how did He treat those weaker** – the lepers, the prostitutes, people with disabilities, the poor, the tax-collectors? Was He harsh or dismissive? Or was He gentle and kind?
- That's why Paul says – vv5-6 – **the way to unity** – is to have *the same attitude of mind towards each other than Jesus had* – so that – *we are together with one mind and one voice* – so that – *we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

You see when we're together at church – it's NEVER **about us** – and our preferences – it's NEVER **about our agenda** – it's NEVER **about our ego** – **it's all about giving glory to God and His Son**

*To God be the glory – great things He has done – so loved He the World, He gave us His Son!*

- Paul says – v7 – ***we are to accept one another - just as Christ accepted us.***

**Jesus accepted us** with all our hang-ups and preferences and quirksiness! We have **no right to judge or condemn someone for their quirksiness** if Jesus accepted them.

But just **one caution here** – Paul is **not** saying we **can't** judge sinful behaviour – **remember** **Paul is talking about judging people on non-essential matters!**

Remember, the **two things non-Christians accuse Christians of** is – being **hypocritical** – and being **judgmental**. A **challenge** for us this morning is – to reflect on our behaviour. **In what ways are we being judgmental?**

- Paul goes on to say – in vv8-12 - **the fact that Christ became a servant to both all (Jews AND GENTILES)** [*that's why Paul lists all the Old Testament references about Gentiles being included in God's plan in v9, 10, 11, 12*] should drive us to **unity and servanthood** like Him

**Challenge:** In what ways might **we** **show unity and servanthood like Jesus** [*a good example was the May Wilce's funeral and Thanksgiving Service*]

- And the wonderful result of - **being unified as Christians** – is that it leads to what Paul describes in v13 – so that - *we are filled with all joy and peace because of our faith* – and so that – *we overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*

## Conclusion

To finish up then

### [Slide-Conclusion]

A simple way to remember what Paul is saying here, is:

- In the Essentials – we must have **UNITY**
- In the Non-essentials – we can have **LIBERTY**
- And in All-things – we must show **CHARITY** (LOVE)

Let's pray...

*We thank you that you accepted us as right with you and approved by you - because of your son Jesus' death and resurrection.*

*As you have accepted us – help us to accept others.*

*Help us each day to grow more like Jesus – and to have His attitude.*

*When it comes to matters which are essential – like Jesus is the only way to you – then help us to have unity.*

*When it comes to non-essential matters – help us to practice our liberty with consideration for others. And in all things – help us to show love – as Jesus did.*

*In His Name, we pray. Amen.*